

# CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN PROFESSIONAL TEAM SPORT ORGANISATIONS: TOWARD A GROUNDED THEORY OF DECISION-MAKING

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## Purpose of the study

The notion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has signalled an increased social involvement of sport organisations across many different contexts, and the sport management scholarly community has started paying attention to what has been claimed to be a mutually beneficial symbiosis (Godfrey, 2009). Most of the extant literature on CSR in professional team sport organisations, however, has focused on the organisational level of analysis, which includes research on individuals (such as executives at the club and/or league level) who are treated conceptually at the macro level (e.g., Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Hamil & Morrow, 2011; Walters & Chadwick, 2009). Such conceptualisation indicates that the main focus remains on the organisations in which these individuals work, rather than on the personal attributes, backgrounds, values, and beliefs that the individuals hold. However, the individual level of analysis involves gaps in our understanding of how these organisational actors go about making decisions (process) regarding CSR-related programmes (content) within a specific institutional setting (context). This paper is therefore set to explore the process that managers in professional teams go through when making decisions about applying CSR in their organisations.

## Background

Football in England is where the strongest institutionalised forms of CSR have evolved. The previously known 'Football in The Community' departments gained independence from their football clubs and converted themselves into foundations with charitable status, managed by a small team of executives and governed by a separate board of trustees. The foundation's relationship with its 'parent' football club is an institutionalised one. It is only very recently that steps have been taken to formalize the relationship between the football club and the charitable foundation through the introduction of a service level agreement (Anagnostopoulos, 2013). These foundations are also accountable to football's governing bodies: the Premier League and the Football League, which mandate funding allocation. This is a crucial point as it constitutes the examination of CSR through charitable foundations a unique context vis-à-vis mainstream corporate foundations (Anagnostopoulos & Shilbury, 2013).

## Methodology

This study utilises the Straussian variant of grounded theory as an overall methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Two data collection techniques have been employed in this study: organisational documents and semi-structured interviews. The organisational documents that have been used in this study (25 documents from 16 different football organisations) provided information on the context within which CSR-related programmes are implemented, and simultaneously enhanced authors' theoretical sensitivity to the nuances of the topic under investigation. In addition, 32 managers were interviewed in person by the lead author through snowball and purposive sampling. The selected interviewees were considered key participants as they were the individuals directly responsible for setting strategic goals and making decisions about the general CSR work being done.

## Findings

The core pattern emerging from this study is one of *assessable transcendence*; a process that, fortified by *passion*, contingent on *trust*, sustained by *communication* and substantiated by factual *performance* enables CSR formulation and implementation through charitable foundations in football. *Assessable transcendence* is represented by four simultaneous micro-social processes that, at times, seem to work against each other, to form the platform upon which the managers in the foundations make decisions about CSR. The study revealed that, through the process of **Harmonising**, managers seek to **Transcend** without neglecting the fact that **Safeguarding** is an essential element of their decision-making process. At the same time, the process of **Manoeuvring** enables managers to achieve their aspirations in their working environment and through the managerial power they possess. Harmonising is the process that explains those *conditions* which affect how managers in football clubs' charitable foundations make decisions. Safeguarding is the process that explains the *set of reasons* which leads managers to make the decisions they do regarding CSR. Manoeuvring is *modus operandi* that foundation managers employ to deal with the factors that constrict the implementation of CSR. Transcending is the process that *spurs* foundation managers' decision-making as a result of the large scope for further CSR involvement.

## Conclusion

This paper makes a twofold, yet interconnected, contribution to the literature on CSR in sport by (a) focusing on the individual level of analysis and thus offering a theoretical framework that explains the decision-making of those individuals responsible for the application of CSR in professional team sport organisations, and (b) shifting the focus of the scholarly activity away from content-based research towards more process-oriented approaches. CSR content research does little to explain how professional teams (possibly) achieve and (ideally) maintain such positioning through both deliberate and trial-and-error CSR actions initiated by the individuals therein.

## References

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